

Testimony for Joint Hearing on Utility Response to Tropical Storm Isaias
Cold Spring Harbor Laboratory

Good morning. My name is Stephen Monez and I am the Chief Facilities Officer at Cold Spring Harbor Laboratory, with our main campus located in Nassau County in Cold Spring Harbor, NY. The Lab is one of the world's leading non-profit institution's focused on groundbreaking biomedical research in cancer, neuroscience, plant biology and, most recently leading efforts to combat COVID-19. Founded in 1890, the Cold Spring Harbor Laboratory now has an annual operating budget of approximately \$185 million and employs over 1,100 scientists, technicians, administrative, and support staff.

We are a proud contributor to New York State's biomedical powerhouse on Long Island where we partner with Brookhaven National Laboratory, Stony Brook University, Hofstra University and Northwell Health System. I want to thank the members of the Legislature for inviting the Lab to testify today regarding our experiences during and after Tropical Storm Isaias, the response we received from PSE&G Long Island, and our proposal to improve the disaster response of PSE&G in the future.

Tropical Storm Isaias was a fast moving yet devastating weather event that brought back vivid memories of Superstorm Sandy for many Long Island residents. With more than 420,000 customers losing power during this year's storm -- the most destructive since Superstorm Sandy¹ - the Long Island Power Authority and PSE&G were faced with an enormous challenge.

The power outage at Cold Spring Harbor Laboratory from this tropical storm lasted 7 days, 1 day longer than in the aftermath of Superstorm Sandy. After the billions of dollars that have been invested in the power infrastructure here on Long Island over the last 7 years since Sandy, customers like Cold Spring Harbor Laboratory expect greater resiliency.

¹ <https://abc7ny.com/heat-wave-tristate-power-outages-tropical-storm-isaias-coronavirus-pandemic/6374350/>

Cold Spring Harbor Laboratory appreciates the scale of Storm Isaias and the difficulties PSE&G faced as they attempted to restore power to hundreds of thousands of customers. At no time during this event did the Lab demand power be restored immediately – our request to PSE&G was very simple – “please provide us with an accurate estimated time of power restoration.” I am here today to highlight the failure of PSE&G to properly communicate with the Lab in the aftermath of Isaias. It is unfortunate that the Lab’s experience was not unique and many of PSE&G’s other customers had similar experiences.

The limited, direct communication the Lab was actually able to have with PSE&G resulted in the same responses from the company for six days straight – “power would be restored by tomorrow at noon” or “tomorrow at midnight”. At first, the Lab had great confidence in PSE&G’s communications, but as the days passed it was clear that information we were receiving from PSE&G representatives was inaccurate. This put tens of millions of dollars of active biomedical research at risk.

On our campus, every hour an emergency generator operates as the sole source of power to a critical facility, the greater the risk of complete power failure. Lab equipment that houses and preserves the research would have failed and with-it research would be lost. Emergency power systems are meant to carry a facility for a couple of days reliably through an emergency. These emergency systems are not meant to operate as the main power source over an extended period of time. Relying on poor, inaccurate communications from PSE&G limited the Lab’s ability to make critical decisions to restore the integrity of our campus’ grid sooner.

With accurate information from PSE&G that was upfront about power restoration being 5-7 days away, Cold Spring Harbor Laboratory could have rented and deployed mobile generators to restore cooling systems and power that would have allowed us to shut-down our limited, temporary emergency generators. The effort to mobilize rental generators and connect them to the Lab’s electrical grid takes many hours and financial resources. The Lab had to make

decisions to use our limited resources wisely, and the Lab did not want to expend unnecessary resources if we were told by PSE&G that power would be restored “tomorrow.”

The Lab’s first communication with a PSE&G representative who had decision-making authority occurred 7 days after power was lost. Prior to that conversation, we had unproductive communications with our account manager and unanswered emails from Daniel Eichhorn and other senior leaders at PSE&G. I firmly believe that the call we had on day 7 from PSE&G was the result of pressure from the New York State Department of Public Service and Governor Cuomo’s office, with which the Lab had contact with for several days already. Power was restored to the Lab within 4 hours of that day 7 phone conversation.

I also believe the situation was exasperated by PSE&G’s failure to designate Cold Spring Harbor Laboratory as a critical facility. This designation is an issue that we are currently working to resolve. PSE&G provides a critical facility access to various tools and resources as outlined in their 2020 Long Island Power Restoration Plan Section 12. Communications Protocol that was filed with the New York State Department of Public Service on December 13, 2019. CSHL requests that those tools and resources be made available as soon as possible along with contact info for PSE&G’s Customer Assistance Center, Escalation Manager, and Large Customer Support Coordinator as outlined on page 152 of the PSE&G 2020 Long Island Power Restoration Plan. CSHL formally requests that PSE&G meet in person with key stakeholders to review procedures and create an open dialogue so as to not repeat what occurred over the last couple of weeks.

There is no doubt that severe weather is a threat to us all. With that understanding, we need to work together as a community to prepare for future events of similar or greater magnitude. Earlier this year Cold Spring Harbor Laboratory started an engineering analysis in order to evaluate an electric micro-grid installation to increase our normal power resiliency and further reduce our carbon footprint. The Lab submitted this plan to the New York State Energy

Research and Development Authority (NYSERDA), requesting monies to help offset the project cost, but that request was not granted.

Cold Spring Harbor Laboratory does not understand why this planning proposal could be denied and our experience with Tropical Storm Isaias highlights the critical need for this project and New York State grant assistance. If New York State wants to retain world-class biomedical research facilities in its economy, the State needs to support and invest in infrastructure for these operations to succeed. Installing more emergency power generators is not a viable long-term solution for risking hundreds of millions of dollars of critical research required to address the current pandemic and our nation's longer-term needs associated with cancer, neurological diseases as well as agricultural and environmental challenges.

As a first step for power resiliency, Cold Spring Harbor Laboratory supports (A8936/S6868), legislation carried by Senator Jim Gaughran and Assembly member Fred Thiele to create a process for the Public Service Commission to require compliance and level a civil penalty, including the revocation of a service provider's authority to operate within the state, if the provider does not follow the commission's orders² related to fraud, abuse, and mismanagement. Further, the 1.1 million LIPA customers deserve a more competitive environment similar to what exists in other parts of the state, where customers are able to purchase power from suppliers other than the local utility.

To quote from the bill memo of the 2013 LIPA Reform Act, passed in the wake of Superstorm Sandy, "the fact that the LIPA-service provider structure is largely excluded from State utility oversight, has proven to be unworkable³." Unfortunately, this could be written about today's situation as we discuss yet another devastating storm. Given the communication failure, the

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https://www.nyasembly.gov/leg/?default_fld=&leg_video=&bn=A08073&term=2013&Summary=Y&Actions=Y&Memo=Y

failure to designate Cold Spring Harbor Laboratory as a critical facility, and the broader reality that after seven years, significant reform, and substantial ratepayer-funded expenditures, there is a clear case for further state oversight of LIPA and PSE&G.

Thank you for the opportunity to testify. I look forward to working with the Legislature to ensure the Lab's electric system becomes more resilient and PSE&G is responsive to customer needs.